

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 034

CS 210 133

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TITLE Enhancing Literature with Writing Assignments.
PUB DATE 21 Mar 86
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference (5th, Phoenix, AZ, March 20-22, 1986).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
-- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS High Schools; *Literature Appreciation; Reader Response; Reading Comprehension; Student Evaluation; *Teaching Methods; United States Literature; *Writing Exercises; *Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Journal Writing; Prereading Activities

ABSTRACT

On the basis of a National Humanities project proposed by the English department of a St. Louis, Missouri high school, many different approaches to drawing students into writing about and understanding literature were developed. One of three such techniques is a sequence of writing-reading-writing that offers the possibility of both enhancing the success of writing with greater understanding and reading with a clearer focus. A second technique is the use of creative journal writing. Journal assignments before, during, and after reading can stimulate student interest in unit themes, anticipation of characters and plots in certain pieces of literature, and responses to literature in ways other than the traditional critical/analytical essay. A third technique is the use of writing for accountability in lieu of book reports or quizzes. Journal assignments can be structured to help teachers determine whether students have read their literature assignments and how well they comprehend the readings. (Appendixes include a series of writing assignments, including prereading activities, appropriate titles, and final writing topics; sample student book reviews; sample entries from student journals; and suggested journal assignments for American literature courses.) (HTH)

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ED276034

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Enhancing Literature with Writing Assignments
Session F.6
NCTE Spring Conference
Phoenix, Arizona
March 21, 1986

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Nancy Groth, Recorder

Introduction

Despite national and district attention to writing skills, the English Department at Parkway North High School in St. Louis, Missouri, felt that weaknesses in student writing persisted. Form, structure and mechanics had improved noticeably, but many English teachers thought that the content and vocabulary of student writing was adequate, not excellent. Their dissatisfaction led them in 1983 to propose to the National Humanities Faculty a project which would use writing to draw students into literature, thereby increasing student engagement with the work and at the same time improving student writing about and student understanding of literature. On the basis of the National Humanities project, many different approaches to drawing students into the work were developed. Three are presented here. Joseph L. Moceris describes sequencing assignments related to a reading selection. Journal writing topics which involve students in reading are described by Janet Hiller, and Barbara Osburg explains how journal writing can be used in place of the familiar quiz over the reading.

Joseph L. Mocerì

Writing-Reading-Writing Sequences

A sequencing of writing-reading-writing offers the possibility of both enhancing the process of writing with greater understanding and promoting reading with clearer focus. What is necessary in such a sequence is that the teacher make reading selections which lend themselves to particular experiences commonly shared by young writers or to selections which are clear reflections of a particular philosophy or historical period. Structured pre-reading-writing assignments which require students to examine their own values and experiences or to research particular individuals and historic periods promote a reading of literature which is both more informed and more sensitive to the author's purpose and art. Once the original writing/research has been completed, the novel, poem, or short story should be introduced. Students should be required to respond to, explain, and expand on the work with information on insights derived from their pre-reading assignments. After having completed the reading and class discussion, the original writing assignment can be re-evaluated. Processes of expansion through example, contrast, supplementary documentation, and analysis are then applied to the first writing. Focus, thesis, topic, and evaluation may shift in light of the literary experience. In any case, the revised writing should be a more considered and informed discussion of a topic. The sequencing has therefore resulted in both improved writing and more informed reading.

A suggested series of pre-reading assignments, titles appropriate to those assignments, and final writing topics is presented in the Appendix. Obviously, the possibilities for topics, titles, and skills are myriad. However, careful consideration must be given to the building of a coherent sequence and to the significant length of time necessary to complete the sequence. The instructor must make careful decisions before beginning a sequence. He must decide specific writing skills which are best associated with specific titles. Or conversely, the instructor must decide the particular title he wishes to use and then create a sequence which builds writing skills that relate directly to that work. In either case, priorities need to be established from the outset, and they must be kept carefully in focus throughout the exercise. Time allowed for a sequence varies enormously--one week to one month. An entire course may very well be a series of writing-reading-writing sequences. The instructor may find that he covers fewer works in a course, but he may well find that the understanding of the included works is fuller and deeper and that the writing about those works is a reflection of clear understanding.

Janet Hiller

Journals, Sermons, Letters, and Stories: Responding to Literature

One of the important goals of the Parkway North High School literature department is to try to get students involved personally in the reading that they are asked to do--not an easy task. Is it possible or even imaginable? We think so. As Larry has explained, with the help of a National Humanities Faculty grant, the English Department has developed an entire program to lead students to, into, and through a piece of long literature. But if, for instance, a teacher must cover the entire survey of American literature in one semester, this program becomes tedious and impractical. No need, however, to scrap the entire concept. It is possible to get students personally involved in an author's style, meaning, and choice of format in as little as ten minutes a day.

Enter the journal in literature class. Creative journal assignments given before a reading assignment, during the reading, and after the completion of the task can actually force even the most disgusted, resistant student to a personal understanding--and maybe even appreciation-- of the piece of literature (see Appendix for sample entries from students' journals). For example, before students read a single page in my American literature class, I ask them to write a ten minute journal entry, one page long, answering the question, "Is the American Dream possible for all Americans?" They know what the American Dream is; they hear about it constantly in advertisements for cars, homes, and T.V. miniseries. After ten minutes of writing, I ask them to read their journals aloud--magic! A theme important in American literature as been painlessly introduced without lecture. And students already feel that they have some expertise in the subject area. Thereafter, they look for this idea in the assigned readings and begin to understand the concept of theme in literature.

The journal entry can also be of great help when assigned before a particular piece of literature. For instance, before assigning "Young Goodman Brown," I ask students to write about a time when they became so disappointed in a person that they lost faith in them. Before assigning "The Open Boat," I ask the students to describe, in ten minutes, a terrible experience they have had with nature. Again, these journals are read aloud, and I can painlessly introduce naturalism and the idea of an indifferent, powerful universe. These pre-reading journals allow students to understand content when they do finally read the piece and also help them to know that great literature is for all people and deals with the experiences of all people, not just the intellectual elite.

The journal assignment can also be used effectively during the time a student is reading. For example, if students are reading an excerpt from "The History of Plymouth Plantation" in class, stop them half way through the hour. Ask them to write, in ten minutes, a diary entry from a space traveler who is approaching and stepping onto a strange planet. Remind them that the purpose of the journal is to describe the planet for the understanding of all mankind for all history. This kind of journal assignment helps them to have patience with Bradford's detail and also forces them to understand the enormity of his task.

Finally, the journal entry is of enormous help after an assignment has been read and before it has been discussed. With my intermediate level juniors, I have found that their major problem in a literature class is lack of confidence in their ability to understand what they've read. They refuse to believe that they know what they're talking about. I grade my daily journals on quantity only, not quality: they must write a page in ten minutes to receive full credit. This type of grading is less threatening to students, and they are willing to take a risk or two writing their ideas. Also, they can risk writing in a new form, such as poetry, knowing that everyone else in the class is just as insecure and unprepared. For example, after reading "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," my students wrote a sermon of their own, imitating Edwards' style, and incorporating Puritan beliefs. Like Edwards, they were required to use an analogy in their sermons in order to clarify the message of the sermon. The results were spectacular. One student explained that "we live our whole lives as if we were on the edge of a cliff with the earth and rock giving way under our feet," to explain "God's infinite mercy."

After Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider," the students were asked to write a short poem in which, like Whitman, they explained an abstract idea by comparing it to a concrete item. One student compared an ant and its work to human ambition. Another student compared a lame dog to a heart broken in love. This assignment showed the students how poets work and how poetry works, giving them more confidence in their ability to read later poems.

The journal is a place for students to create, to take risks, and to find out just how much they know and understand about a subject that to many seems distant and difficult and pointless.

Barbara Osburg, Ph.D.

Writing as Accountability: In Lieu of Book Reports and Quizzes

Writing may be used in collaboration with literature for a number of purposes. Ms. Hiller has explained that journals may be used to stimulate student interest in a theme, to anticipate the characters and plots of certain pieces of literature, and to create opportunities for students to respond to literature in manners other than the traditional critical analytical essay. Writing may also be used to help teachers assess their students' mastery of the material in less traditional ways than the critical essay. Writing may be used to find out if students have read their assignments and if they have comprehended the material.

I don't know about you, but my students don't read their assignments. And some of them who read the material don't do well on objective quizzes over the material. And neither those who read nor those who don't can reveal their understanding or lack of it in the critical analytical essay. Those two phenomena have caused me to create new ways to make them accountable for their reading.

I use the journal in lieu of a quiz. I ask them to summarize the plot of "Young Goodman Brown" or to tell the end of "The Pit and the Pendulum." Or I assign "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" at the beginning of class and tell them to paraphrase it in their journals. I may have them read "The Open Boat" and (since I lectured on Naturalism the day before) then have them use their notes to explain how it is a Naturalistic opening. Another strategy might be to have them begin Act Two of Death of a Salesman and tell how the mood of the play has changed since the beginning of Act I. Once I have taken attendance and dealt with the hundred other things I need to do at the beginning of class (like go to the restroom and sign absence slips), I ask selected students to read aloud from their entries. Those who didn't do their reading, either as homework or in class, are embarrassed by the stupidity of their entries or their inability to write anything. I grade these journals five at a time whenever I feel like it and then give credit to selected entries, scanning to see if the student finished the story. Or, like Ms. Hiller, I can grade them on the spot by circulating the room while they write and catching those who didn't read.

To reinforce more careful reading and attention to detail, I assign longer versions of some of the creative journal assignments Ms. Hiller mentioned. Students have a week to write their own letter from the Mayflower back to England and the letter must evidence detail from Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation" in order to receive credit. Nothing more clearly reveals their understanding of the conceit than their attempts to write their own metaphysical poetry in the fashion of Edward Taylor's "Huswifery" or a sonnet like Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband". Modernizing the aphorisms of Poor Richard's Almanac is another way of getting them to analyze the values of Franklin's day and those of today; for example, "A stitch in time saves nine" may become the famous quote from Brave New World, "Ending is better than mending." Once Naturalism has been explained and "The Blue Hotel" read or viewed on video tape, students can be asked to write their own Naturalistic story beginnings which evidence a hostile or indifferent, meaningless

universe; some students even choose to complete their stories. Style is a very difficult concept to grasp, but imitation helps to clarify for students just what aspects of a writer's product are crucial to his style. Hence, an imitation of Hemingway's stark dialogue between a woman and her lover in "Hills Like White Elephants." One more example--the most enjoyable one of the year--can be an exercise in concrete poetry after reading/looking at the famous German poem "Apfel."

Book reports are also a problem. I have designed forms (see Appendix) for fiction and non-fiction selections and students fill out index cards with crucial items. I grade only for the revealing items like plot summary and get through these in a flash. X.J. Kennedy in his wonderful text Literature (Little Brown) has designed more complex forms for reviews of short stories and plays which I make use of for lengthier works. Instead of objective and essay tests over each major work (I do have unit tests with both objective and essay items), I assign the drama and short story reviews (see Appendix). These are graded quickly by giving those who complete the forms a C and using the crucial items of Narrator, Tone, and Theme to separate the better reviews (As and Bs) from the average (C).

Ultimately, of course, students will cheat from time to time and we can't stop it. But we can save ourselves untold hours of quiz grading, still reward those who read, still find out (if not punish) those who don't read, and enjoy what our students write by assigning writing assignments to make students accountable for their reading.

ENHANCING WRITING THROUGH LITERATURE

Literary Allusion

<u>Skills Promoted</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Read the Work</u>	<u>Final Writing</u>
Library Skills Documentation Collateral Reading Oral Presentation Critical Analysis Close Reading	Teacher compiles a list of literary reference from a specific work (classical civilization, Bible, contemporary political literary allusions). Student researches independently and gives brief written or oral report for class on specific context of allusion.	Suggested Titles: <u>Moby Dick</u> <u>The Waste Land</u> <u>Paradise Lost</u> <u>Canterbury Tales</u>	1. Critical paper on how and why writers use a particular literary allusion--what aspects of the allusion have most importance and how do they contribute to a particular scene, character, theme. 2. Analytical paper which explores the use of allusion to promote symbol. 3. Analytical paper that illustrates how our passage relates to the entire text.

Historical Analysis

<u>Skills Promoted</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Read the Work</u>	<u>Final Writing</u>
Research Skill Documentation Paraphrasing and Summary Close Reading	Students write a documented research report on a specific historical movement, philosophy, influential or archetypal figure; e. g., Hobbes, Franklin, Napoleon, Stoicism, the Great Depression, Industrial Revolution.	Suggested Titles: <u>Gulliver's Travels</u> <u>The Great Gatsby</u> <u>Grapes of Wrath</u> <u>Candide</u> <u>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch</u>	1. The critical paper which illustrates literary treatment of historical movement or one that focuses on the literature of social realism or protest.

Appendix

First Person Narrative

<u>Skills Promoted</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Read the Work</u>	<u>Final Writing</u>
Understanding the use of point of view in literature Organization of the Personal Essay Documentation from Text	Assign students to write a short paper in which they describe a personal experience out of which grew a particular insight or a new point of view, a new attitude. Assignments must be specific; e. g., the first time you felt powerless, the most terrifying experience, the first time you defied your parents.	Suggested Titles: <u>Huck Finn</u> <u>Catcher in the Rye</u> <u>The Prelude</u> <u>"The Tell Tale Heart"</u> <u>Notes from Underground</u>	1. Critical paper which analyzes the author's success or failure in conveying a particular attitude or emotion. 2. Critical paper on the character of the narrator based on his reactions to specific events.

7. Third Person or Omniscient Narration

Skills Promoted

Understanding Point of View

Character Analysis

Activity

Students write a narrative essay in which they describe the effects and reactions to an event or an individual other than themselves. The writer may include his attitude or carefully exclude it.

Read the Work

Suggested Titles:

The Great Gatsby

The Life of Dr.

Johnson

The Secret Sharer

The Turn of the Screw

The Color Purple

Senig Miller

Final Writing

1. Critical paper which explores effects of point of view on theme, characterization with specific attention to narrator as character vs. author as narrator.

7. Theme in Literature

Skills Promoted

Writing Dialogue

Punctuation of Dialogue

Character Analysis

Compare and Contrast

Organization in

Exposition

Activity

Students write an imaginary conversation between two people who have opposing views on a specific topic; e. g., love, war, sin, faith, materialism. (The Rogerian letter activity could be employed with two students composing one letter).

Read the Work

Suggested Pairs of Work:

The Stranger/Babbit

(secular values)

The Great Gatsby/The

Scarlet Letter (Hester

and Daisy's view on virtue)

The Great Gatsby/Resurrec-

tion (Materialism)

Childe Harold/Candide

(pessimism/optimism)

Final Writing

1. The paper of compare and contrast on the treatment of a particular theme in literature.

2. The creative paper in which two literary characters debate a topic.

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OUTSIDE READING
FICTION

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

YEAR WRITTEN:

MAJOR CHARACTERS (include brief summary of these characters):

MINOR CHARACTERS:

PLOT SUMMARY (in chronological order):

Who would enjoy this book and why?

OUTSIDE READING
NON-FICTION

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

YEAR WRITTEN:

MAIN IDEA:

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BOOK:

ONE INTERESTING FACT YOU LEARNED READING THE BOOK:

Who would enjoy reading this book and why?

Fiction Review

(Student's name)

(Course and section)

Story: "The Tell-Tale Heart," 1850Author: Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Events in summary: (1) Dreading one vulturelike eye of the old man he shares a house with, a madman determines to kill its owner. (2) Each night he spies upon the sleeping old man, but finding the eye shut, he stays his hand. (3) On the eighth night, finding the eye open, he suffocates its owner beneath the mattress and conceals the dismembered body under the floor of the bedchamber. (4) Entertaining some inquiring police officers in the very room where the body lies hidden, the killer again hears (or thinks he hears) the beat of his victim's heart. (5) Terrified, convinced that the policemen also hear the heartbeat growing louder, the killer confesses his crime.

Central character: An unnamed younger man whom people call mad, who claims that a nervous disease has greatly sharpened his sense perceptions. He is proud of his own cleverness. Other characters: The old man, whose leading feature is one pale blue, film'd eye; said to be rich, kind, and lovable. (Also three policemen, not individually described.)

Setting: A shuttered house full of wind, mice, and treasures; pitch dark even in the afternoon.

Narrator: The madman himself.

Tone: Horror at the events described, skepticism toward the narrator's claims to be sane, revulsion (or at least detachment) from his gaiety and laughter.

Style: Written as if told aloud by a deranged man eager to be believed, the story is punctuated by laughter, interjections ("Hearken!"), nervous halts, and fresh beginnings--indicated by dashes that grow more frequent as the story goes on and the narrator becomes more excited. Poe often relies on general adjectives ("mournful," "hideous," "hellish") to convey atmosphere; also on exact details: the lantern that emits "a single dim ray, like the thread of a spider."

Irony: The whole story is ironic in its point of view. Presumably the author is not mad, nor does he share the madman's self-admiration, nor join in his glee ("I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done"). Many of the narrator's statements therefore seem verbal ironies: his account of taking an hour to move his head through the bedroom door--"Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in!" Probably we would have shuddered.

Theme: Possibly "Murder will out," but I really don't find any theme either stated or clearly implied.

Symbols: The vulture eye, called an Evil Eye (in superstition, one that can implant a curse), perhaps suggesting too the all-seeing eye of God the Father, from whom no guilt can be concealed. The ghostly heartbeat, sound of the victim coming back to be avenged (or the God who cannot be slain?). Death watches: beetles said to be death omens, whose ticking sound foreshadows the sound of the tell-tale heart "as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton."

Evaluation: Despite the overwrought style (to me slightly comic-bookish), a powerful story, admirable for its concision and for its memorable portrait of a deranged killer. Poe knows how it is to be mad.

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Drama Review

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(Student's name)

(Course and section)

Bertolt Brecht (German, 1898-1956)
Mother Courage and Her Children, 1941

Central character: Anna Fierling, ironically called Mother Courage, petty war profiteer: a camp-following peddler. Shrewd and cunning, she is in some ways perceptive (her seeing the "religious war" as actually being fought for gain), in other ways obtuse (her belief that the war can bring prosperity to her and her family). Though driven by greed, she is somehow splendid in her determination to go on, no matter what.
Other characters: her daughter Katrin, the play's true heroine: a mute, generous and tender-hearted ("She suffers from sheer pity"). Mother Courage's sons, each the other's opposite: Eilif, the elder, clever and unscrupulous; Swiss Cheese, the younger, stupid and honest. Lamb, a cook: in his youth a Don Juan, now just an ordinary sensual man — frank and down-to-earth, but selfish. Yvette Pottier: a prostitute, later an officer's wife — cynical and disappointed in love. The Chaplain: a weak, fallible man of mere words (except for one moment when he seizes Mother Courage's shirts to make bandages).

Scene and time: Europe in 1624-1636, during the Thirty Years' War. Scenes take place in Sweden, Poland, Germany — wherever armies go: towns and villages, encampments, highways.

Major dramatic question: Will Mother Courage's prophecy (that her children will die) be fulfilled?
 Swedish

Main events (numbers indicate scenes): (1) When/army recruiters try to enlist Eilif, Mother Courage tells fortunes and predicts death for the recruiting sergeant and for her children. Eilif enlists. (2) Two years later Mother Courage, while selling a capon to the Swedish commander's cook, finds Eilif risen in the army and, for having robbed peasants, thought a "brave soldier." (3) Yvette relates her bad luck in love; Katrin envies her. Mother Courage, Katrin, Swiss Cheese (now an army paymaster), and the Chaplain are captured by the Catholics. Swiss Cheese is executed when his mother haggles too long over his ransom. She is afraid to claim his body. (4) Singing her "Song of the Great Capitulation" to a disgruntled soldier, persuading him to accept things as they are, she decides not to file a complaint against soldiers who destroyed her goods. (5) After a battle she vainly tries to prevent the Chaplain from using her shirts for bandages. Katrin saves a baby's life. (6) A head wound ruins Katrin's chances for marriage. For a moment Mother Courage curses the war, but (7) is soon plying her trade again. (8) In a brief interlude of peace the Cook reappears; so does Yvette, who identifies him as her seducer. Eilif, sentenced to die for slaying a peasant, is granted a last visit to his mother, but finds her gone to unload goods before prices fall. The Cook conceals the news of Eilif's doom and replaces the Chaplain as a wagon-puller. (9) The Cook inherits an inn, asks Mother Courage to join him in running it, but he won't take Katrin along. The girl overhears this proposal and tries to run away, but her mother stops her and sends the Cook packing. (10) Mother and daughter pull the wagon. (11) Hearing that children are threatened by a surprise attack on a town, Katrin mounts a rooftop and beats a drum to give warning. She is shot to death. (12) Hauling her wagon alone, Mother Courage goes on endlessly chasing the war.

Dramatic irony: In (8) and (12), Mother Courage expects to see Eilif, not knowing of his death. In (9), unknown to Mother Courage and the Cook, Katrin overhears their talk about her.

Theme: "War is a business proposition," as Mother Courage declares in her song (7). The sergeant, at the close of (1), applies this theme to her and her family: "When a war gives you all you earn / One day it may claim something in return!"

Tone: indignation mingled with compassion (particularly for Katrin) and bitter humor. Brecht seems to admire Mother Courage for her horse-sense and her ability to endure, yet he sharply condemns her naive trust in war and in the almighty guilder.

Symbols: the canteen wagon — the heavy burden of war, the cross to which Mother Courage is finally harnessed without hope of salvation. The Cook's pipe, source of his nickname Peter Piper (another caster of spells?). It shows his nature as a lover: his violence and callousness. Yvette's red boots, which Katrin covets: ability to attract men. To Mother Courage (6), they seem a way for Katrin to dispose of her virtue. The wealthy farmhouse and the song within it (10): smug, selfish happiness that tries to ignore others' sufferings — the attitude of Mother Courage herself.

Recommendation for a production: Exact realism isn't possible in staging a play that includes much of Europe and a period of thirteen years. Perhaps the wagon, the central symbol, should look as real as possible; but costumes can look timeless and abstract. Scenery should appear impermanent: shattered houses, pitched tents. Stage directions seem to call for a picture-frame stage to accommodate so many back-grounds ("In front of a half-ruined personage," "a prosperous farm house"), so many horizontal highways. The leading actress shouldn't sentimentalize Mother Courage as a brave, noble Mom, but instead should portray her as a fallible, stubborn human being.

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Sample Entries from Students' Journals

What do you know about American literature? (first day of class)

Actually, I don't know a whole lot about American Literature. I do know that it consists of things like poetry, prose, theatrical readings, and books such as novels. All I really know about the history of American literature is that the literature is written by American people. I know that we have used American literature for a long time and we are going to continue using it. It is kind of hard to write about when you don't know very much about it. Only people who have studied it a long time can really tell you what it is like and it can make you understand about problems and life back then and what is happening now and the similarities and differences between them.

Describe a perfect place (for a sense of place).

Favorite or perfect place is quite different to all kinds of people. Each person and even each racial or ethnic group has been raised under different conditions and are accustomed to certain "places". I agree with B.F. Skinner's beliefs that we are a product of our environment. Along with that, our tastes and senses grow to like what we are used to. In the history of America, Blacks have had a hard time, so the perfect place in a Black's opinion would lean towards city life. There, they are secure, and around similar people. They are comfortable because they have freedom and control. For women the perfect place is where they can have their equal rights. Where they have a part in the ruling of their own affairs. They feel more secure and are generally happier. City and country dwellers have had opposite experiences therefore have mostly opposite opinions.

Imagine you are a space traveler and describe the new planet for the folks back home (for colonial travelogues).

We are now approaching the planet Venus, about 10 minutes until landing. This is a very strange experience, for 2 hours ago it seemed as though the planet was bubbling with molten rock. But as we approached it closer we realized that the visuals were only red and yellow trees that were formed like jellyfish with tentacles.

* * *

Our ship, the U.S. Chameleon, has now landed and the nine passengers including myself are preparing to unboard. The air is an exact equal to that on Earth, and the temperature is 61 degrees Fahrenheit, so the crew is in no need of pressure gear.

* * *

As I step down on to the planet I see many vegetational species that correlate with those on Earth. But they move more, and are very bright colors. As we move along, a wild beast approaches us that is splattered black and red. This animal does not seem violent, and it kind of resembles a small dragon. The crew and I have not seen any humanoids as yet, but our land animal detectors tell us there is some kind of civilization about 1 kilometer away.

* * *

The small town we have arrived at is quite spectacular, just like a scene out of Dungeons and Dragons. Many humanoids are coming out of their dwellings to inspect us at this time. I would suspect we are the first to visit from another planet. The women all have zebra style striped skin that is miraculously black and white. They also have striped manes that reach down their back. But their facial and body structure is that of Earthlings. Men are also shaped like Earthlings, but their skin is like a leopard with a lion's mane.

* * *

In our conversations with these people through a translator machine we learned that their civilization is 11 times as old as ours, that they live an average of 320 years, and that they are hatched as grown adults off of trees.

* * *

It is now time for our departure, so we bid them well and leave a token of appreciation, and board the ship. Take-off is in process...and we are off back to Earth to relay our experiences.

Write your own sermon in the manner of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

In our lives on this earth we must not be proud or conceited. We have no reason to be, for we cannot determine our own future. Only God has the power to save us from our evil human nature and bring us into his grace. We live our whole lives as if we were on the edge of a cliff with the earth and rock giving way under our feet. Off balance and going over the edge we have no way of saving ourselves from falling into the chasm below. We can only hope for divine help from God. Only God knows from the beginning who will be saved or who will fall and be crushed below. You see, since the fall of Adam we have all been worthy only of an awful death, for we are naturally evil. Yet God in his mercies will let an elect few into heaven and not fall over the edge. But we must be humble toward God and not boastful. We have no reason to be proud for God will let us fall and die in our sin. Yet still he is merciful to a few and through grace we are pulled back from the cliff and into eternal safety. Only those touched by the Grace of God will be saved, and the rest will fall and die. There is nothing you as humans can do to save yourselves so be humble and have faith, quietly waiting for God's hand of Grace to pull you back from the crumbling cliff. O Sinner, do not boast of God's love for you, but bow down humbly and accept God's forgiveness as the gracious gift it is. Have faith, for only God and time have your fate on that cliff.

Explain something abstract by using something concrete (for "A Noiseless Patient Spider")

Sand

The beach is covered with sand.
 The earth is covered with beaches,
 billions and billions of grains,
 Each unique and yet the same.
 Each independent but all together.
 Working united to complete their goal;
 to form the beach.
 The room is full of people.
 The Earth is full of rooms,
 billions and billions of people,
 Completely different but exactly alike.
 Cooperating together to complete their goal;
 to live together in peace.

Ambition

Determination,
 A factory machine,
 Tireless, ceaseless,
 Pounds out its one product,
 pounds out its one goal,
 with no mind to distract it.

Ambition,
 Narrow minded, one sided,
 Automatically functions, utilizing numerous conjunctions,
 Drives hard, achieving its goal and satisfaction,
 Whatever the cost.

Paraphrase "To My Dear and Loving Husband"

TO MY DEAR AND LOVING HUSBAND was about a lady telling her husband how much she loves him. How there is no other woman that loves her husband like she does. All the mushy stuff about how much she cares about him and what she would do for him compared to other women. Personally, I don't know if I could ever love my husband or boyfriend as much as she does, because she sounded pretty in love and caring. I don't know if I'll even fall in love. I hope I will be able to someday, and be able to care about someone and of course him care about me the same exact way. The relationship should be 50/50 in EVERY relationship. I don't think any woman should kiss the man's feet like this one did. It should be equal.

Why might freedom be considered dangerous? (Of Individualism in Democratic Countries)

There are many reasons why democracy and/or freedom would be thought undesirable by individuals. One major reason why many people would prefer an alternative system of government over democracy is because in democracy everyone is looking out for themselves and often times forget about their own lineage while in a country where there is an aristocratic ruling system each person's general position, both morally and economically, is based almost solely on his or her ancestors. Another reason why many people might find democracy even dangerous is because of its unstableness. In democratic countries devotion of service is rare, and social rules (who you are a servant to and who is servant to you) aren't clearly spelled out, while the same person in an aristocratic ruling system knows at all times who is above him and below him both economically and socially.

* * *

Freedom would seem dangerous to the people who want to control other people. Freedom should be a human right. A person shouldn't be able to tell another person how to run his life. Government should be destroyed by an uprising by the people. I think every single person in the world should be an anarchist. After all, I'm one, but I'm not going to tell people how to run their life. It is really beyond me why people want to control other people and have power. It's been that way for all of time.

Letters from and to Ben Franklin and His Sister

Dear Ben,

Thank you so much for the spinning wheel. It's come in handy already. I've made four blankets to go with Samuel's saddles, and every little bit helps, you know. So how is everything in the city of Philadelphia? I've heard rumors that you've taken up an apprenticeship with a printer. I bet all the ladies of Philadelphia would just love to catch a young printer!

Things here at Samuel's shop are alright. Ever since the English Parliament passed the Navigation Act, leather is getting more expensive.

Then again, you would know more about that. Are you still keeping interest in politics? Maybe you should go back to England and become a member of Parliament.

Sincerely yours, Jane

* * *

Dear Jane,

You're very welcome for the spinning wheel. It was the least I could do for my new bride sister. So how is Samuel these days? I hope his business is getting better, even with those Navigation Acts.

Speaking of which, I've just joined this club, called the Committees of Correspondence. We're writing about the injustice of those acts right now. That's enough politics for now.

Jane, I've met this girl named Deborah and I think she might be the one for me. Last night I took her to a ball at Lord Pincky's and I had a grand time.

Sincerely, Ben

* * *

Dear Jane,

I bring you good news. I'm to be married to Deborah on the 22nd of March. I hope that you and Samuel will be able to make the trip from Boston, for I am most eager for you to meet my beloved.

Have you heard about the new acts England has passed? The two most dreadful are the Stamp Act and the Tea Act. Both of these acts are taxation without representation. I now belong to a group called the Loyal Nine. We're writing petitions and sending them to England.

Your loving brother, Benjamin

Summarize Chief Joseph's speech

Chief Joseph criticizes the White man's American dream because of what they came and did to the Indian's American dream. They came to America and instantly claimed it theirs not thinking if there were people who had been there previous to themselves. The White man began to build many cities where the Indians had lived, hunted, and relied on for their natural lifestyle for hundreds of years. The White man didn't care what they had done to the Indian's environment they just wanted their English environment which they had left to come to the U.S. They drove the Indians out of their once peaceful environment into a long term agonizing journey westward. This would only stop when there was nowhere left to travel. The Americans set up plantations and thought they were being fair to these people who had been such savage people toward the White man. The White man couldn't see that the way they were living was the way they had always lived. They only thought it was such a savage way of living. The White man brought the way they had always lived in England to America, but couldn't see how the Indians could live the way they did. These disputes would go on for years and years, only to start large scale fighting and killing upon both of these societies. Today the same things go on between races of mankind. There are problems between religious groups, different races, and people with different ethnic backgrounds. So the feuds will go on forever in my opinion.

Respond to "I Hear America Singing"

Before I start my journal entry I must say that something wonderful and unexpected did happen to me. I'm so prophetic. Oh well, I like that Whitman poem. It's very straightforward, optimistic, and almost like a song. I can just hear music in my mind when I read it. It shows the brightest side of the American dream : people that are happy in their respective professions. Essentially, one can't be happy if one doesn't like one's occupation. I also think that this poem exposes the Puritan work ethic in its best light. Work is indeed therapeutic and good for the soul and gives one a sense of pride and accomplishment. And finally, I think Whitman shows that people are the foundation of the American Dream. Ordinary people, humming along like cogs in a machine, keep the whole country going. Labor isn't all that bad after all in America.

Paraphrase "The Gift Outright"

"The Gift Outright" by Robert Frost I think is talking about how America was a gift to the immigrants and explorers looking for a new land. It was a gift they took outright and sometimes thought that since they found it they possessed it but it was only a gift and that we should treat it rightly with respect to the native people. Instead, in return for the gift we fought wars and we started destroying it. He said the land was ours before we were the land's because we settled the land but England still had control of the colonies. The land doesn't possess us because we can act freely but people try to possess the land. The people also gave of themselves outright to protect the land they found so worthwhile and a land worth living on. The land started empty but the people put all they had into it and made its history, art, and culture we study today and keep making.

Re-write a fable or fairy tale in the style of Holden Caulfield.

I have this story if you're interested. I mean you don't have to listen if you don't want to. The characters are really phony as you'll find out.

It starts out in this real crummy town. There were only three houses in this town. What kind of town only has three houses? Anyway, there was this mean wolf in this town and he thought he owned it. Now how does a wolf own a town for Chrissake? That's what I'd like to know. In this town also were these three huge pigs that the wolf wanted to eat. I don't think these pigs were too happy about the situation, either.

These three pigs were hiding inside one of the houses and get this, it was built out of hay. Now what kind of house is built out of hay? That is so phony. Anyway, the wolf was pretty hungry, so he thought that he would eat them, but he had to blow down the house first. You should've seen those pigs laugh at the wolf. I mean, it was so goddam rude of those pigs, so the wolf blew down the house. I mean it. It was so phony the way he did it.

I don't believe it. I mean the three crummy pigs go away. Now how does a pig get away from a wolf for Chrissake? I wish the wolf would just finish off these pigs but they hid in another house, this time made out of wood. He blew that one down, too. I can't believe it. It's so phony. He's probably a boxer or something. This time the pigs hid in this brick house. You should've seen how mad he got. He called them all sonofabitches. I would too. Wasn't that about the most phony story?

Poe formula tale

This story starts with a normal everyday businessman who is up and about to leave his home for what he thinks will be a normal day at the office. What he doesn't know is that the owner has closed all business today only for one reason; to take action against this hard-working man that everyone is jealous of. When the man gets to work he finds the doors locked, but he knocks and his secretary answers and today she is dressed in leather with chains hanging all over her body. She grabs him and throws him in the closet while the rest of the staff plans out what torture this man will receive first. The man lays in this closet until he notices that snakes are all around him. As they start striking him he notices that the venom has been drained, so in his agony he realizes that someone has plotted to torture him. This is when he realizes he is in for a day that he will never forget if he lives through it.

My Wife's Revolt (For "The Revolt of 'Mother'")

Today the men have come to build my new barn. Thank God they are finally here. I can no longer live off of the money of the few animals we have now. It just aint proper for a man to have to.

Today when my wife, Sarah, saw the men diggin' she made such a fuss. Honestly, I just don't understand these ornery women. Where do they learn it?

The new cows should be here soon. I'm hoping the barn'll be ready by then. All the other men have fresh new barns filled with cows, so why shouldn't I?

I was unloadin' the wood and tryin' to git a load of gravel done before 2 o'clock when my wife done interrupted me to complain. She gets on this game where she thinks she can tell me how to run my life. She tried to git me to make the barn into a house. I just don't understand it. There twarn't nothin' wrong with the home she got now. The roof don't leak, she got her kitchen. I don't know what else she wants. She tells me the house ain't fir for daughter nanny if'n she gets married to that old boy she's seein'. But I got to have me my barn. If I don't it wouldn't be proper.

Silent snow, Secret snow (What symbol would you use if, like Conrad Aiken, you wanted to explain a growing isolation?)

The symbol I would use to describe someone slowly becoming insane would be the wind. I would pick the wind because it is very powerful and it can almost frighten a person. It is so powerful sometimes that it can blow very important things right out of your life such as if a tornado would hit. The wind kind of discourages people because they can be so vulnerable to it. The wind comes and goes all the time and you can never catch up to it. It passes you by, then that burst leaves forever. As to do with insanity, if a person was terribly insane they could be scared of the wind all of the time, even when they see the wind just blowing dust around. It also symbolizes even the person. When a person goes insane, it's like their mind's just blowing away from their body. This is like the wind blowing things around this person away from them.

* * *

I would use a dripping faucet to describe mental illness. The faucet that at first drips slowly leads to a faster, faster, and finally a gush of water. It describes how mental illness is a slow progressive disease. It starts slow and steady then faster and harder to eventually make a person break down or gush, and hurt himself or go crazy.

There is also a feeling of frustration connected with a faucet that drips. The mentally ill often feel uncomfortable or frustrated with their disease. The person feels trapped. They can't get away from it and they don't even know why they feel that way until they finally gush and have a breakdown.

Journal Ideas for American Literature

1. Tell me everything you know about American literature.
2. Is the American Dream possible for all Americans?
3. Describe what is for you, the perfect American environment (for the theme, A Sense of Place).
4. How might the sense of place in America be different for blacks, women, city dwellers, country dwellers? (for "Lenox Avenue Mural" or "City of Harlem")
5. Why might many people consider freedom and/or democracy to be a dangerous or unworkable idea? (for "Of Individualism in Democratic Countries")
6. Pretend you're a passenger on the Mayflower. Write a letter home to friends or relatives in England describing the journey, the conditions, and other passengers (For "The History of Plymouth Plantation")
7. Be a Puritan. Knowing everything you know about Puritan religious beliefs and social customs, and history, write a diary entry for one day. (for "The History of Plymouth Plantation")
8. You are a Puritan minister. Using Jonathon Edwards as a model, write a sermon reminding your congregation of the basic ideas of Puritan thought. Like Edwards, use an analogy. (For "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God")
9. Tell me what you think happens after death. Keep "Thanatopsis" in mind, perhaps.
10. What criticisms does Chief Joseph make against the white man's American Dream? What was Chief Joseph's own American dream? (For "An Indian's View of Indian Affairs")
11. Explain when your own guilty conscience haunted you the most. (For "The Haunted Mind")
12. Describe a time when you became so disappointed in a person that you lost faith in them. ("Young Goodman Brown")
13. Using Poe's formula for the "tale" write a plot summary for a short story. (For "A Descent into the Maelstrom")
14. Write a poem similar in structure to Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider" in that you use a concrete item to illustrate an abstract idea.
15. Describe a terrible experience that you had with nature. (For "The Open Boat")
16. Write a new ending for "The Open Boat."

17. Give a guess as to what the subject matter of 20th century poetry might include.

18. Write a plot summary for an original science fiction short story, then explain the theme.

19. What symbol would you use if, like Conrad Aiken, you wanted to explain a growing isolation? ("Silent Snow, Secret Snow")

20. If you could save only three possessions to last a lifetime, what would they be and why? ("The Portable Phonograph")

21. Describe some things you hate about school.
(Catcher in the Rye)

22. Using Holden's writing style, rewrite a fable or fairy tale.
(The Catcher in the Rye)